EXTREMISM

British MP Provides Glimpse Into Hamas's U.K. Support Network

HAMAS, UNITED KINGDOM | January 8, 2024

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On the 16th November 2023, Christian Wakeford MP named four individuals in Parliament he described as "Hamas operatives" in Britain. The individuals named were:

- Zaher Birawi
- Muhammad Qassem Sawalha
- Majed Khalil al-Zeer
- Ziad El Aloul

Who are these individuals? A glimpse into their activities shows that they are heavily involved in several organisations at the forefront of pro-Palestinian activism in the UK. If the allegations of their affiliations to Hamas are accurate, this demonstrates the extent to which Hamas has successfully embedded itself into the pro-Palestinian movement while concealing its true nature, coopting understandable sympathies for Palestinian people.

As reported widely in British media, several of the organisations and individuals which have been instrumental in the coordination of mass rallies and protests in London and beyond are in fact linked to both Hamas and the wider Western Muslim Brotherhood milieu. Hamas was originally founded as a Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and, as an official British government report put it: "the Muslim Brotherhood treats them as such."

The Hamas ecosystem in Britain and the Muslim Brotherhood

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The Hamas ecosystem in Britain and the Muslim Brotherhood network around it has supported Hamas in either financial or propagandistic terms (or both), as well as serving to delegitimize the existence of Israel and the non-combatant status of Israeli civilians, serving to justify terrorism against Israelis. As the official government review states: "the Muslim Brotherhood at all levels have repeatedly defended Hamas attacks against Israel, including the use of suicide bombers and the killing of civilians."

This does not mean that thousands of ordinary protestors are aware of the connections of some of these individuals and groups, much less supportive of them. But great care should be taken by authorities, politicians and public figures in whom they support when aligning themselves to the Palestinian cause. Meanwhile, registered charities should be subject to the utmost scrutiny to assure they are not supporting extremist and proscribed terrorist groups.

CEP has assembled the below snapshot into the activities and connections of the four men named in Parliament regarding their affiliations with Hamas in order to provide greater awareness and understanding of how organizations like Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood operate in the West, often through overlapping charities, NGOs, and media fronts:

Muhammad Qassem Sawalha

- In 2017, Muhammad Sawalha was revealed by *The Times* to be a senior member of Hamas' politburo who resides in London.

- Sawalha held a position on the board of trustees at Finsbury Park Mosque in London, but in 2019 resigned from this position as a result of *The Times* investigation.
- Finsbury Park Mosque denied knowledge of Sawalha's background with Hamas.
- Finsbury Park Mosque's leadership was appointed with the help of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) which, according to an official government review, is "dominated" by the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is a branch.
- Sawalha was a founding member of MAB and listed as a director of the organisation from 1999 until 2007.
- Muhammad Sawalha's son is listed as a director of the MAB.
- Sawalha also co-founded the British Muslim Initiative (BMI), along with other activists associated with MAB. Despite Finsbury Park Mosque's distancing from Sawalha after the Hamas links were exposed, both he and the Mosque's chair are listed as officers for BMI.
- An October 2023 report in *The Times* described Finsbury Park mosque's chair as "Hamas friendly".
- An October 2023 exposé in *The Times* described Sawalha as having run "the group's terrorist operations in the West Bank."
- In 2004, Sawalha was listed as a co-conspirator by the *US Department of Justice* in a terrorist financing case in Israel, stating that Sawalha was a "Hamas military chief for the West Bank" and was "in charge of terrorist operations" in the territory.

- The *BBC* described Sawalha as a "fugitive Hamas commander," and perhaps "the most influential Muslim Brother in Britain today."
- In 2019, Sawalha joined a senior Hamas delegation to Moscow, indicating very recent ties to the group even following his 2017 exposure by *The Times*.
- Sawalha has been granted citizenship by the United Kingdom and resides in government housing in London.

Ziad El Aloul

- Ziad El Aloul appears to act as an unofficial spokesman of the pro-Palestinian movement in Britain. He frequently appears at rallies and protests, and sometimes alongside political figures and elected members of parliament.
- El Aloul is associated with the Palestinian Forum in Britain (PFB). He was previously associated with a since dissolved company named 'Palestinians Abroad'.
- Shortly before the October 7th attacks in Israel, El Aloul spoke at a conference in Jordan. His remarks were the subject of an article on an official Muslim Brotherhood website.
- In the article he is referred to as a general coordinator for 'Palestinians Abroad'.
- At the Jordan conference, El Aloul speaks on a panel adorned with a banner displaying the Muslim Brotherhood's official logo.
- El Aloul shared a number of posts on social media

glorifying the 7th October Hamas attacks against Israel, including videos taken during the attack by Hamas terrorists and civilians who crossed from Gaza into Israel.

- This activity was the subject of an article in *The Jewish Chronicle*. Following the attacks on the 7th October he posted the following message on social media: *"All of our people are happy and express their joy, except for some of the weak and cowardly among our people who stand in confusion about their affairs in a moment of glory."*

Zaher Birawi

- Zaher Birawi was the director of *EuroPal*, an organisation which was dissolved in 2017 but is active on social media.
- Birawi has posted photographs to personal social media accounts over several years of meetings with senior Hamas leadership figures.
- Birawi was chairman of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) between 2001-2003. According to a British government official review, the MAB has historically been "dominated" by the Muslim Brotherhood.
- Birawi was designated as a member of an illegal organisation by Israel in 2013.
- Birawi held a senior position in the Palestine Return Centre (PRC), described by the Israeli government as "the organizational and coordinating arm of Hamas in Europe. Its activists maintain ties with senior Hamas

officials and promote Hamas' policy."

- In 2019 Birawi hosted an event in London titled 'Understanding Hamas.'
- Birawi has held positions in a number of organisations linked to the pro-Palestine movement and the Muslim Brotherhood milieu, including hosting programs on *Al-Hiwar*, which has been described as "affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood".

Majed Khalil al-Zeer

- As reported by *Der Spiegel* magazine Majed al-Zeer, a British citizen who moved to Berlin in 2014, is officially named in German intelligence reports as "the person responsible for Hamas in Europe."
- Al-Zeer is a founding director of the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC), which was described as a "forum" for Hamas in a 2011 German intelligence report.
- The PRC was prohibited by Israel due to its links to Hamas.
- In 2015, Hamas sent formal congratulations to Majed al-Zeer after he was granted a non-governmental observer status in the UN Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations.
- Al-Zeer has previously called for "violent resistance" against Israel.
- Al-Zeer has been photographed alongside and speaking at events with leaders of Hamas, including Ismail Haniyeh (who sent personal congratulations to Al-Zeer), and Khaled Mashal.

- Al-Zeer has been interviewed on *al-Aqsa TV*, which in 2010 was designated by the US Treasury as being controlled by Hamas.
- Al-Zeer's organisation, the PRC, published a report on the 21 October 2023 claiming that an Israeli air raid struck the Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza. Overwhelming evidence suggests it was a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) rocket.
- A further PRC report published on the 30th October aimed to refute Israeli evidence of the atrocities committed by Hamas during the 7th October attack.

Hamas exploitation of the humanitarian and NGO sector in Western countries was the subject of discussion at the infamous 1993 Philadelphia meeting of Hamas operatives, recorded under FBI surveillance. More recently, in 2018, Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh openly discussed this strategy, stating: "We must defend the Palestinian agenda in the humanitarian and global aspect as well. Today, many important opportunities exist, including in the Western countries, which can be relied on to build our strategy: the boycott movement - the BDS, the marches, solidarity convoys."

Clearly, this strategy has enjoyed success in Britain, but more alarmingly, it has evaded much in the way of official scrutiny. Above all, the UK's Charity Commission must demonstrate that it is not allowing the charity sector to be exploited by extremists of the Muslim Brotherhood or proscribed terrorist groups like Hamas for fundraising, coordinating, or

propagandistic purposes. Britain is falling dangerously behind many of its European neighbours in clamping down on domestic Islamist activity of this sort, and must take action before it is too late.

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- Abu Ali al-Askari, Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) Security Official
Mar. 2023

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